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Seven little girls share a calabash dish of corn and greens at the noon meal during a day of communal field work.

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Boys spin tops on a banana leaf.

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Chapter 5

Late Childhood: From Loincloth to Thoughts of Marriage

WHEN an Alorese child is given his loincloth, he has taken the first step 858
toward adult status. This marks the beginning of late childhood, a period
that lasts from the age of five or six years until adolescence. Children 157
between these ages are called moku. At the beginning of this stage the
prolonged and violent temper tantrums begin to disappear, and with
some exceptions they completely die out in the course of two or three
years. I should suggest that the disappearance of these tantrums is ex-
plicable in terms of the data contained in the preceding chapter. Tan-
trums are not an adequate technique for mastering an external world so
inconsistent as that provided by Atimelang. Aside from having the fu-
tility of this technique borne in on them, children from five or six on-
ward begin to pick up other devices for mastering the environment—
devices that give greater satisfactions than those they can force from
their elders. It is primarily with these devices that this section will deal.

At this stage differences become apparent between the life of boys
and that of girls, so that it will frequently be necessary to treat them
separately. Certainly one general impression that can be stated imme-
diately is that boys are much less shy, much more in evidence, and
much more mobile than girls. The reasons may be found in what fol-
lows.

RELATION OF FOOD TO TRAINING FOR THE ADULT ROLE

The first question to consider is what food the child expects and 855
from what sources. A boy can expect a meal at home about seven 847
o'clock in the morning and another at about the same time in the eve- 846
ning. During the intervening twelve hours he learns to forage for him-
self in the field play groups of free-roving children. Remnants may be
scraped from the cooking pot; a variety of insects, usually spurned by
adults, can be found; in the fields near the house are papayas, mangoes,
bananas, sweet potatoes, young corn, and other vegetables that can be
eaten raw or can be easily cooked.

As a rule adults do not object to the minor depredations of their 867
own children and their playmates, but if raiding is too constant or the
crop is scarce, children may be forbidden this kind of foraging. Such
objections are most likely to be voiced when children are reaching the
age at which their existence in the fields might be expected and is not

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mr 1322 1752 immunity to sleep with him. When a young man ties up his long hair and walks with bells on his basket, women watch until he has passed by, and then they say, 'Isn't that a fine man!' and begin to hoot. If he wears a big white shawl from the coast, women will say, 'There goes my white chicken!' and then they hoot. The young man feels glad but also a little ashamed. Also, when a young man begins to versify at a dance and his voice rings out clear and strong, the next day the women will say, 'Don't we have a fine man in our village!' and then they will hoot. When there is a dance, the young man will hunt for areca and betel the day before so as to fill up his basket. When he reaches the dance place on the night of the dance, all the young women will crowd around him and hold out their hands for areca. If one woman comes back again and again for more areca, it is a sign that they already want each other, and soon they will go off and make an agreement. Then the girl says he must go find her bride-price."

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1752 This comment sets, better than any outsider could, the pattern of masculine vanity, which often persists through life and which is recognized as a male trait. Consistent with this newly developed swagger, other changes occur in young men's lives. In the course of a few months they break away from the irresponsible free-roving play groups of growing boys and become far more solitary and sedentary. They imitate the indolence of older wealthy men. At the same time, they begin to speculate about the possibilities and the means for entering the financial system of the adults and about ways of ingratiating themselves with men of influence who may be of assistance to them. The whole question of entering financial activities will be discussed presently in connection with marriage.

5322 1852 1852 One significant detail concerning food should be noted in connection with the coming of age in boys. The picture so far of the development of masculine vanity and the good-natured teasing that it involves is thoroughly familiar to us. There is another and comparable source of teasing. Boys who are beginning to show open interest in girls and to visit the village of someone they find attractive will be teased by older people with comments like the following, "Padama has gone to visit his wife in Karieta. When boys grow up, the food their mother cooks no longer tastes good. They have to go to the house of a young woman to eat." This kind of teasing makes the younger boys squirm with embarrassment much as it would in our society. A few years later a young man will insist on a midday meal even if he has to cook it himself, as a symbol of the adult status he is struggling to acquire. The extent to which food and courting ideas can be linked is also exemplified in the follow-

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nitude. Hardly a feast or ceremonial gathering occurred without at least one acrimonious dispute. My first impression was that these debates might lead to violence at any moment. People shouted at each other and men grasped their bows or swords in the right hand. They took short springing steps backward and forward shouting challenge before meeting the point under debate. The usual preamble was "Hik, hik, my friend So-and-so!"

Further acquaintance with such debates revealed that they practically never developed into physical violence, at least between men. In eighteen months on one occasion only did men come to blows and begin to spar with swords. Even then the gestures were largely formal and seemed deliberately wide of the mark. Finally, by accident, one man received a slight scratch on the forehead. He immediately threw down his sword and rushed to the dance place to litigate. Repeatedly I had the impression that the principals as well as bystanders were terrified lest a quarrel develop into real violence. In every outbreak of any magnitude much of the furor was caused by alarmed neutrals who tried vigorously to placate the opponents and who shouted orders that there was to be no fight. The reasons for the fear will be more apparent when the nature of group responsibility is developed, especially in connection with war.

This does not mean that there never is any real violence, but it does mean that when it occurs it is usually within the small family groups, where repercussions are apt to be limited. The anecdote (page 60) of the man who beat, unmercifully and without interference, his young half brother, is a case in point. In another instance a girl of about fifteen came to have a bad scalp wound dressed. At the time, she told me that she had fallen. Later I discovered that her mother had struck her with a stone because she had gambled away her own dance anklets in the newly introduced card game that was the rage among young people.

Quarrels were so frequent that an attempt to record all of them proved too time-consuming. However, in even the partial record made, every type of kin was involved: parents with children, siblings with cousins of both sexes, grandparents with grandchildren, aunts and uncles with nieces and nephews. An informant in discussing these intrafamilial quarrels added quickly, "But they don't last long. They must forget and eat together." Again food appears as a symbol of reassurance and social euphoria. Out of forty-seven quarrels of sufficient vigor to produce a public outburst and to come to my notice, thirty-six were between acknowledged kin. This is not a significant number in view of the high degree of interrelationship within the villages. What is signifi-